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RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 2803  
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 3035  
RHMFISS/USCENTCOM SPECIAL HANDLING MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY  
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 001272

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA  
ALSO FOR IO ACTING A/S HOOK, PDAS WARLICK  
USUN FOR KHALILZAD/WOLFF/SCHEDLBAUER  
NSC FOR ABRAMS/YERGER/MCDERMOTT  
DOD/OSD A/S LONG

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [KPAL](#) [UNSC](#) [MARR](#) [IS](#) [LE](#) [SA](#)

SUBJECT: LEBANON: AOUN EXPECTS VIOLENCE AFTER RAMADAN

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4  
(b) and (d).

SUMMARY

1. (C) In a August 29 meeting, Free Patriotic Movement leader General Michel Aoun told visiting NEA DAS David Hale and Ambassador that he expected the volatile northern city of Tripoli to erupt in violence after Ramadan. Aoun blamed Saudi funding and ideology for fueling the militant elements currently fighting in the area. Aoun said the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) should establish specialized counterterrorism units to track and target the Al-Qaeda linked fighters before they could strike. He also said the main problem facing Lebanon is the Palestinian refugee issue. DAS Hale told Aoun the USG was prepared to help the LAF with additional training and was prepared to assist the GOL to prepare for the 2009 parliamentary elections. He said that Lebanon needed to take Israeli concerns regarding Hizballah's rearming seriously and fully implement UNSCR 1701. End Summary.

EXPECT A BATTLE IN  
TRIPOLI AFTER RAMADAN  
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2. (C) Visiting NEA DAS David Hale, accompanied by Ambassador, NEA/ELA Lebanon Desk Officer, and PolOffs, met with Free Patriotic Movement leader General Michel Aoun at his home in Rabieh on August 29.

3. (C) Aoun said that the Salafist expansion throughout the north is a major problem. Aoun said Al-Qaeda militants had infiltrated the northern city of Tripoli and surrounding areas, but added that he did not believe they would be able to expand their presence throughout Lebanon. A battle would occur in the north soon after Ramadan, according to Aoun.

4. (C) He also said Salafists militants in the north received funding, as well as their ideology, from Saudi Arabia. He did not know whether it was the Saudi government or Saudi individuals providing the funding, but said it needed to end in order to prevent a larger battle from erupting. DAS Hale agreed with Aoun that financial and arms flows to their elements needed to stop and added that whoever is responsible for funding such groups is playing with fire. Aoun asked the USG to approach KSA officials and ask that

they do more to halt terrorist financing in Lebanon.

LAF NEEDS SPECIAL FORCES  
STYLE COUNTERTERRORISM UNITS  
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15. (C) Aoun said the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) needed special forces units specifically trained to track and target small terrorist cells before such cells could commit an attack. He added that the LAF and Internal Security Forces (ISF) need to broker an agreement between the opposing sides and different factions currently fighting in the north. Any party not willing to negotiate should be "dealt with," according to Aoun.

16. (C) He thanked the USG for its continued support to the LAF, and welcomed additional training for special forces units. He added that the Europeans could also do more to help in this field. DAS Hale said the USG stood ready to do what was needed to help the LAF meet the terrorist threat.

HIZBALLAH RE-ARMING,  
A PROBLEM FOR ISRAEL  
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17. (C) DAS Hale noted Israeli Defense Force (IDF) alarm with Hizballah's ability to rearm. DAS Hale said Lebanon needed to make credible efforts to halt the smuggling of weapons across and within its borders, in conjunction with UNSCR 1701. Aoun claimed Hizballah did not want another war with Israel at this time.

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18. (C) Aoun stated that tension is high with Israel at the moment because of the inflammatory comments made by both sides in the media. Aoun noted that Hizballah has everything it wants and that Sheba'a Farms was not an "urgent enough" issue to start a war over. DAS Hale told Aoun he agreed with him that neither side wanted another war, but noted that Israeli concerns about Hizballah's arms was genuine and serious, and shared by the USG. The GOI was unlikely to sit idly by if the GOL continues to do nothing about weapons smuggling.

NEW ELECTORAL LAW WILL  
BE BETTER THAN BEFORE  
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19. (C) DAS Hale told Aoun that one purpose of his visit to Lebanon was to learn what the USG could do to help support the 2009 parliamentary election process. Aoun said he felt confident that a new electoral law would be passed by parliament by September 25, and that it would be better than the previous law. He said he would try and push for adopting all of the "Boutros Law" electoral reforms after next year's elections and before the 2013 elections.

110. (C) Aoun noted that next year's election would be the first time Lebanon has tried to hold a one-day election. He said certain conditions would be needed in order to carry out this task, mainly political stability. If political stability is not present on election day, then a one-day election will not happen, he said.

PALESTINIAN PROBLEM  
THE MAIN ISSUE  
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111. (C) Aoun said the main problem facing Lebanon is the Palestinians. According to Aoun, the problem of the Palestinian camps will destroy any chance at stability and security in Lebanon if unaddressed. Lebanon could not afford to absorb the Palestinians into Lebanese society, Aoun said. He also said the terrorist elements inside the camps were a problem. DAS Hale said the GOL needed to assert control

within the camps regardless of the refugees status, and that the Israeli/Palestinian peace negotiations would help to address this problem as well.

READY FOR NATIONAL DIALOGUE  
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¶12. (C) Aoun said he was ready for President Sleiman to begin the National Dialogue. However, Aoun said enlarging the list of invitees, as some of Aoun's opposition partners have advocated, would be inefficient and suggested no more than seven participants be invited. Aoun said all participants needed to be serious about coming to a consensus on the issues. Aoun said expanding the list of topics to be discussed was acceptable, because not everything was discussed during the Doha Agreement's negotiations. The cabinet and the parliament should now work to put into implementation the goals outlined in the ministerial statement, he said.

¶13. (U) DAS Hale has cleared this cable.

SISON